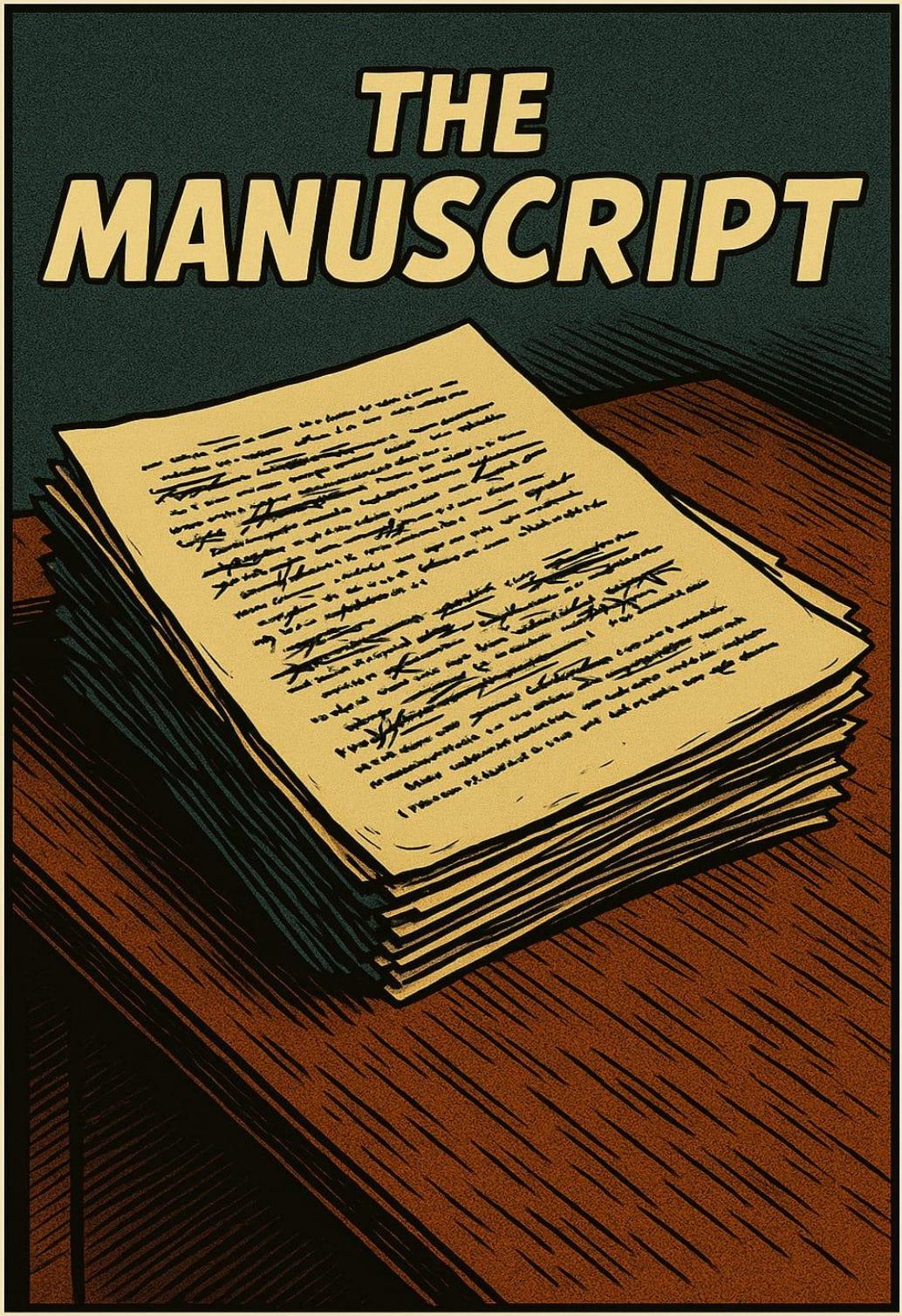
THE
MANUSCRIPT

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(Dim office. Venetian blinds cutting the morning sun into prison bars. The desk is buried under a skyscraper of manuscript pages that list every blasphemy, obscenity, and geopolitical rant known to humankind. The Man smokes a cigarette down to the filter without noticing. His secretary, clipboard in hand, looks like she hasn't slept since the Nixon administration.)

Man: (slaps a page) Did we say *fuck religion*?

Secretary: (checking flip pad without looking up) We did. Twice. One of them in italics.

Man: Good. Did we say *hang the Pope*—

Secretary: (already jotting) —"with the entrails of the last king." Yes, sir. Cross-referenced. Indexed. Checked.

Man: (leaning forward, eyes blazing) Did we say *fuck the J—*

Secretary: (cuts him off, exasperated) Sir, we've been through this. It's not going through. No publisher, no underground press, no mimeograph collective in a Moldovan cellar will touch it.

Man: (pounds the desk, manuscripts tremble) But the shelling of hospitals—

Secretary: (calm, monotone) Sir.

Man: (leaning closer, veins popping) *Starving children!*

Secretary: (pinching the bridge of her nose) Sir.

Man: Palestine! Gaza! They're fucked way over their—

Secretary: (snapping, almost shouting) *SIR!* No matter what you write, they slap "hate speech" on the cover like it's a supermarket barcode. That's it. End of story. Please. It's this or no book publishing. We discussed this a million times.

(Man waves her off with a limp wrist, ash scattering across his manuscript like snow over corpses.)

Man: (muttering) Whatever. You never let me be.

Man: (jabbing finger into the stack) Did I say Kierkegaard was a man who loved to suck other men's penises, also having them inserted in his anus?

Secretary: (deadpan, without checking notes) Yes, sir. You made your point defining Kierkegaard as a sodomite many times. And Hume's. And Robert Nozick. The latter several, several—(pauses, looks at pad, sighs)—several times.

Man: Was it disclosed that I meant—

Secretary: —that there is no homosexuality implied, you just like calling people "fags." Yes, sir. It's in the preface. And the introduction. And the cover. In diagonal. Bold.

Man: (nodding proudly) And all of this is seeing the print.

Secretary: Including the typos you so much insisted on.

Man: (leans forward, conspiratorial) You'll see the point of those in thirty years' time. *Thirty years.* And still, I can spell "methonimy," but no *fuck the J—*

Secretary: (slams flip pad shut) Sir!

Man: (squints) Fondle anally the sons of David?

Secretary: (without blinking) Pornhub already has the rights.

Man: (eyes widen like a child on Christmas morning) Really?

Secretary: (flat, venomous) No!

Man: (leans in, whispering with gravity) They told Stephen Hawking that every equation he inserted would cut the number of readers by half. How many did we leave in?

Secretary: (dry as sandpaper) None, sir. You don't know math.

Man: (slaps knee, triumphant) Excellent! All readers will be pleased.

Secretary: (pencil scratching, eyes rolling) Yes, sir. Both your readers will be delighted.

Man: (narrows eyes) I detect some sarcasm here.

Secretary: Me, sir? Never! A nine-hundred-eighty-four-page manuscript (manuscript mind you, not even edited to page size) about *the difference*

between asparagus and the immortality of the soul will have a fantastic audience. The new *Eat Pray Love*.

Man: (straightens tie that isn't there) It is an ironic title. To mean the secret of reasoning.

Secretary: Yes, sir.

Man: Also—Achille Campanile was a genius.

Secretary: Yes, sir.

Man: And I taught you at least three ways to cook asparagus.

Secretary: (momentarily softens) Oh, I loved the one with the egg on top.

Man: (beams like a saint) See? Success already.

Secretary: Yes, sir. The next Escoffier.

Man: And did we reference Borges…

Secretary: (already flipping pages) We did all that, sir. But if you don't mind, I need a fifteen-minute break. My boyfriend has a lunch break from his corporate job—it was ten, but he litigated fifteen. He has to fuck me up the arse because I'm not on my period and we're not trying and condoms are expensive, so—

Man: (blinking, eyebrows like startled caterpillars) Oh. That's oddly specific…

Secretary: Yes, sir. So…

Man: (tilts head, curious) Also very short. Fifteen minutes?

Secretary: (already putting on coat, calm as arithmetic) Have you ever been under twenty-five, sir?

Man: (stands, raises hand in benediction) Go, my child! Go, and don't multiply!

Secretary: (calling back while bolting out the door) Doin' our best, sir!

(Door slams. Silence. The Man stands in his cloud of smoke, staring into memory like a war veteran of forgotten genitals.)

Man: (sighs, mutters) Kids these days… when we were their age… who could see a single pussy hair anyway?

Secretary: (snatches pen from his hand, slaps his wrist) No, sir! Bad sir! You're not re-writing about St. Thomas Aquinas. The chapter has been proof-read and is ready to print.

Man: (pouting, like a child denied crayons) But I was only adding to note fourteen…

Secretary: (leaning close, voice low, authoritative) Sir, I have a colon very full of warm sperm that needs evacuated. Note fourteen stays as it is. Now

you sit back and enjoy the Dave Brubeck Quartet, as I have some very loud wet farts to perform.

Man: (blinking rapidly, caught between horror and reverence) I…

Secretary: (snaps record onto turntable, needle drops) *Rondo à la Turk* fills the room, syncopated, playful.

Man: (clutching armrest, eyes rolling back) Oooooooh.

Secretary: (marches toward bathroom, waving dismissively) Urges. To bathroom.

(Door slams.)

(Bathroom door creaks open. The Secretary returns, pale but lighter, a woman reborn through plumbing. The first thing she sees: the Man, now barefoot, shoes abandoned like casualties under the desk. A second bottle of white wine—second?!—stands uncorked, glistening in the noon light. His hands

sway through the air in undulating sea-waves, eyes half-closed, as if conducting Poseidon.)

Secretary: (clutching clipboard like a crucifix) Sir! We said no booze during sessions.

Man: (swirling glass, voice reverent) Your fault. Brubeck demands Gewürztraminer. It's basically in the score.

Secretary: (checking watch, incredulous) I must have been away ninety seconds. How can that be the *second* bottle?

Man: (grins, lifts glass in toast) I drink in five-four tempo.

Secretary: (already massaging her temples) Oh god—

Man: (suddenly leans forward, eyes manic) Did I already say *fuck the Je—*

Secretary: (sharp, snapping like a whip) *Sir!*

(He freezes, but only for a second. Then, with lips puckered, cheeks ballooning, he launches into an obscene approximation of the Take Five saxophone solo. Spittle sprays. His toes wiggle in perfect syncopation.)

Man: (squints, serious as an oracle) Did we write about adverbs?

Secretary: Several times, sir.

Man: (waves hand, dismissing centuries) No, no. I mean: specifically about adverbs.

Secretary: (blinks) Sir?

Man: (leans forward, conspiratorial) As adverbs are the soul of language… henceforth the world.

Secretary: (alarm rising) …SIR?

Man: Follow me. Take a moron. The moronest moron you can moron.

Secretary: (without missing a beat) I'm visualizing Fox News in northern Florida.

Man: Moroner, but that'll do. Now, construct mentally the moron has to do what I say. I say to that moron: *"You have a hat."*

Secretary: (nodding, jotting) Okay…

Man: Most he can do is touch over his head and say, "Oh, I do." But say I add an adjective. Tell him: *"You have a RED hat."* He looks again at said hat and can say, "Yes, it's red." Right? Doesn't change anything about the moron.

Secretary: Right…

Man: (leans back, triumphant) Say I tell him *"Think."* He thinks once, then done with it. But I add an adverb: I tell him *"Think ALWAYS."* It changes his nature. Not a moron anymore. Now he thinks.

(Silence falls. The fluorescent buzz dies. The Secretary lowers her clipboard slowly, eyes wide as though she has just witnessed either the birth of philosophy or its violent death.)

Secretary: (whispering) Sir… you… sir… you just…

Man: (smiling beatifically, raising glass of Gewürztraminer) And still… fuck the Je—

Secretary: (slams pen down, suddenly ecstatic) Oh yes, sir, say it already. You deserve it.

Man: (raises finger like Moses, but drunk) *Sodomize the people of David!*

Secretary: (clapping hands, delighted) Oh let's, let's, let's!

Man: With heavy and very solid phallic objects!

Secretary: Oh let's, let's, let's!

Man: Like…

Secretary: Oh let's, let's, let's!

Man: (breaks character, frowning) No, I'm actually brainstorming for ideas here.

Secretary: (stammers, recalibrating) Oh. Right. Uh… like… their missiles and projectiles?

Man: (rolls eyes, disappointed) Oh come on. Basic.

Secretary: Right… say… Pornhub paraphernalia?

Man: (tilts head, nods) Nice, but think about the variety. We'll never see the end of it.

Secretary: Correct. So…

Man: (snaps fingers, triumphant) I was thinking an Italian *nonna's* rolling pin.

Secretary: (gasps, scribbling furiously) Oooh! Nice! And rooted in Mediterranean culture.

(The manuscripts now lean like the Tower of Pisa, but instead of falling they seem to grow longer,

thicker, absurdly engorged. The Man and his Secretary sit opposite each other, both drunk on Gewürztraminer and inspiration. Their dialogue takes on the rhythm of a sacred litany, half cookbook, half pornography, half ethnography—yes, three halves, because mathematics no longer matters.)

Man: Sicilian aubergines, long as a child's forearm, grilled, oiled, inserted with dignity.

Secretary: Tunisian harissa tubes, ribbed, spicy, burn going in *and* out.

Man: (swaying) Calabrian sausage ropes, thick, coiled, smelling of smoke and regret.

Secretary: Santorini cucumbers, watered by volcanic soil, worshipped by goats, yet destined for sodomy.

Man: Maltese pastizzi rollers, deceptively humble, always underestimated until it's too late.

Secretary: The Cypriot halloumi block. Not phallic per se, but let's carve it—where there's will, there's willy.

Man: (closes eyes, whispering) Neapolitan pizza peels, broad, flat, but oh the leverage.

Secretary: (breathless, scribbling) Moroccan tagine funnels—narrow tip, then wider, wider, *wider*.

Man: (laughs like a prophet of smut) And Turkish döner skewers—straight steel, spinning endlessly.

(Their voices grow softer, as if chanting across centuries. The wine bottles roll empty across the floor. The manuscript is now indistinguishable from a catalogue of ancestral Mediterranean implements—half kitchenware, half weapon, half cosmic dildo compendium. Again: three halves. Logic abandoned them many pages ago.)

Secretary: (murmuring, fading) Sardinian breadsticks… the long, hard, crackling ones…

Man: (eyes closing, fading too) Sicilian cannoli… cream-filled… eternal recurrence…

(Their words trail into silence. The blinds rattle gently in the sea breeze that has somehow entered the room without windows. Off in the distance, faintly, the Dave Brubeck Quartet keeps time as the scene dissolves—five-four, five-four, five-four…)